Bearers of a Dangerous Memory: The Prophetic Legacy of Mary Ward

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York St. John, Thursday August 10th, 2017

I have had some time to prepare for this reflection with you and in my many moments of self-doubt

I have asked myself what can I say about Mary Ward that has not already been said..... so I thought I

might start with an image not of Mary Ward but of an event in 2010.

Slide 1: Haiti – little boy being rescued

I want to put some context on the imageMany of you will recall the catastrophic earthquake

that decimated Haiti in 2010. The estimates of the death toll vary but it is estimated to be much

more than 250,000 with 300,000 injured and 1.3 million people displaced. Given these numbers we

know that the effects of the earthquake will last for generations to come and are still being felt very

acutely in the midst of catastrophe one profound image stands out for me, many days after the

initial search and rescue one young child was pulled from the rubble....

For me this image is a reminder of the resurrection- when all hope is lost, when the weariness of the

search has set in... when we're just about to give up, life begins again. We spend a great deal of our

lives occupying the moments between death and resurrection - waiting, searching, hoping And

in this regard there is a temptation to focus on two key dimensions of Mary Ward's legacy; the

opposition and subsequent suppression of her Institute and her heroism and courage in the face of

this opposition. The truth is that for long periods of Mary Ward's life she occupied the in-between

spaces, that is, the space between death and resurrection. What makes Mary Ward prophetic is not

only that she could read the signs of the times and act with foresight and courage but what makes

her truly courageous is that she had she had the **resilience** to live with uncertainty.

In the first part of the paper this morning I would like to explore some of the elements of Mary Ward's life that mark her out as a prophetic and resilient woman and in the second part of the paper, keeping in mind the title of the paper, "Bearers of a Dangerous Memory" I would also like to explore the resilience of the followers of Mary Ward in keeping alive the memory of Mary Ward I hope that by doing this we can see the parallels between the landscape of Mary Ward's life and the landscape of our lives and perhaps by the end of the morning we can take with us some points of reflection

As we gather in this very special place of belonging for Mary Ward I am mindful of the IBVM and CJ sisters who have done so much to keep the memory of Mary Ward alive..... While they are too numerous to mention here, and at the certain risk of omitting some, neverthless I would like to call to mind Srs. Immolata Wetter, Gregory Kirkus, Henriette Peters, Ursula Dermier, Mary Wright, Jennifer Cameron, Jeanne Cover...... the list goes on through their careful and painstaking research theyhave painted the landscape of Mary Ward's life and provide the historical and autobiographical backdrop that helps us to understand the life and times of Mary Ward these keepers of memory have provided the scaffolding that enables us to reflect more deeply on who Mary Ward is today...

Given our location in York there is one in particular biographer that I would like to highlight, Mary Catherine Elizabeth Chambers who entered Mary Ward's Institute in 1879.

Slide 2: MCE Chambers

The first volume of Catherine's biography of Mary Ward was published in 1882 but the story of Sr. Catherine Chambers is interestingAccording to Sr. Gregory Kirkus' IBVM/CJ biographies Catherine Chambers entered the Institute at the young age of 56!!! She had already spent a number of years in an Anglican congregation before converting to Catholicism... when she entered her

literary skills were recognised by Mother Joseph Edwards, an Institute leader, who was keen to vindicate the memory of Mary Ward,

Slide 3: MJ Edwards

and in 1881 Catherine Elizabeth Chambers and Joseph Edwards made a pilgrimage of investigation that led them through Belgium and Germany. Sr. Gregory tells us that they examined the archives of every house they visited with Sister Catherine filling eight notebooks. In a short space of time this raw data was transcribed into a two-volume work that was to be most definitive biography for more than one hundred years......

I want to explore some moments from that biography with you

In our attention to Mary Ward's life we tend to move quickly from her early life experiences to focus on the latter part of her life since this carries with it more drama and intrigue. But if we are to truly appreciate the resilience and courage of Mary Ward we need to understand where she came from and to whom she belonged.... In Mary Ward's lifetime the Acts of Supremacy and Uniformity and the subsequent suppression of Catholicism meant that those who continued to practice their Catholic faith faced a precarious existence in this context a very strong, militant Catholic population flourished and women in particular had a powerful role within this emergent resistance movement. In response to their resistance, the civil and ecclesiastical authorities imposed heavy fines, seized property and imprisoned both male and female members of the Catholic community who refused to stop practising their faith..... But women in particular seemed difficult to defeat – since women did not own property the only punishment available to authorities was imprisonment and even this seems to have had little effect. Historians have often referred to this period as a "matriarchal era" – since men occupied a public role they were obliged in the public domain at least to give the impression that were conforming to the legislation concerning religious practice. The role of women of women, on the other hand, was confined to the home and in this location they found a new role

for themselves as defenders of the Catholic faith In these new circumstances women were responsible for the religious formation of their households and in this sense they were occupying new roles of leadership.....

Slide 4: Painted Life

it is within this context that Mary Ward recognised and experienced this powerful community of resistance and leadership and in the example of her grandmother Ursula Wright, who had spent fourteen years in prison because of her faith, Mary Ward recognised that women had "something more than ordinary" to offer to the Church and to the world.

And so we come to an essential realisation in understanding Mary Ward as a prophetic woman and a resilient woman. Throughout her life she had a strong sense of place, of where she had some from of the people who had formed her. Resilience comes from being anchored in belonging, and not just belonging to a physical place, it means belonging in a much wider landscape to the experiences and people that have shaped who we are. As Mary Ward travelled through the landscape of her own journey to God she took with her all that had shaped her and formed her as a person and this awareness anchored her and enabled her to be resilient and courageous in the face of the enormous opposition that she faced.

Slide 5: The Companions

This is an image that I'm sure many of you will be familiar with.... The companions of Mary Ward.... It's important to remember that this small group represented a much larger group of companions, and in 1631, when Mary Ward's Institute was suppressed the wider group of companions who had joined Mary Ward's Institute faced a very precarious and deeply unsettling situation. The Bull of Suppression prohibited Mary Ward's companions to live together as religious communities, it prohibited the sisters from accepting pupils into Institute schools and as a result the sisters could no longer support themselves. The young women who had joined Mary Ward's institute were far from

home; they faced incredible poverty and destitution – their choices were few, they could continue to live together as lay women reliant on the alms of local benefactors; they could, if their means allowed, join another religious community, or they could return to their homeland – for many of the young women who were now members of a suppressed Institute the latter options were not available to the them since they no longer had the financial means to return home or to join another congregation. As Henriette Peters notes in her seminal work *A World in Contemplation* Mary Ward must have been tortured by the fate of these women for who she was ultimately responsible. There are several instances where she petitions the Pope on the plight of these women.... In the midst of this tumultuous time of oppression and subsequent suppression of the Institute there are extraordinary examples of courage and resilience. For example, in the house in Liége, the archives tell us that after the suppression of the Institute "the community continued to ring the bell for prayers, for examen, for mealtimes and for school..."(Peters p. 550).

Given what we know about the companions of Mary Ward in the years leading up to and after the suppression of the Institute we can certainly see that they were resilient women. Even at this historical distance it is difficult to account for their extraordinary conviction and tenacity. This courage and resilience was a characteristic of their collective identity and when we look at it more closely we can see that it was nurtured, strengthened and maintained by a very powerful network. Much of what we know about the events Mary Ward's life and the trajectory of her Institute comes to us through her letters to her companions – the "lemon juice letters" are the trademark not just of a resourceful and creative woman but of a woman who knew the importance of keeping the vital network of communication and companionship alive.

Slide 6: MW

A great deal of attention has been paid to the suppression of Mary Ward's Institute; the ecclesiastical and canonical intricacies of the events leading up to suppression of the Institute have been well documented by IBVM and CJ Sisters and MW scholars Immolata Wetter, Henriette Peters, Mary Wright and the Jesuit scholar Joseph Grisar and the ongoing work of Dr. Elizabeth Cotter to have the cause of Mary Ward recognised. As a former IBVM Superior General, Sr Noni Mitchell noted in her foreword to Mary Wright's book *Mary Ward's Institute The Struggle for Identity* "The emphasis [...] on the legal and the constitutional issues does not hide the drama, courage and tenacity of the women who created this story"

By unweaving the complex threads of the events leading up to the suppression of the Institute those who have researched Mary Ward's efforts and the response of the ecclesiastical authorities provide us with a fuller picture of Mary Ward. It strikes me for example, that Mary Ward was a straightforward women who dealt with people in an open and honest manner, and she presumed that the authorities that she was dealing with were being open and honest with her. She believed that the value of her work was self-evident, her enterprise was characterised by resolve rather than compromise. Her apparent defiance was not motivated by a spirit of rebellion but by the realisation that traditional forms of religious life would not serve her apostolic enterprise. This forthrightness and openness left her ill-prepared for the courtly conventions of the papal palace, for example, where what was said personally was not always carried through. But apart from acknowledging a certain amount of naiveté on Mary Ward's part I think we must also acknowledge the powerful forces that were at work against her.

Much attention has been paid to the actions of the popes who issued the decrees supressing Mary Ward's Institute but it is also important that we understand the opponents who worked both outside and inside Vatican circles to provide the often dubious evidence that was needed for the destruction of the fledgling Institute. If Mary Ward was deficient in the language of the Curia her opponents were fluent and their words were finding an attentive audience in Rome. Mary Ward,

was aware of the potency of their words, writing from Rome to Winefrid Wigmore, in 1625 she tells Winefrid that her opponents make themselves "hoarse" when speaking against the Institute and "put up fool memories against us full of horrible lies" (dissertation p.108).

We can say for certain that Mary Ward's refusal to accept enclosure and her determination to adopt the constitutions of the Society of Jesus proved to be catastrophic for Mary Ward's Institute not just in her own lifetime but for centuries thereafter.

By the end of 1611 Mary Ward was clear on the path that she had to take. She was, she believed, mandated by God to "take the same of the Society". The extent to which she achieved this is evident in the Jesuits' concerns that she was replicating their educational enterprise in her schools. For example, in his report to his Superior General written in 1619, the Jesuit Fr. Francis Young while praising the educational work of the Institute hopes that the members of the Institute would "stay within their own bounds" and "not by imitation of our Society" introduce "a scholastic regime oversophisticated and not necessary", lest they "engender public ridicule" (dissertation p. 73). It is interesting to note that their opposition Fr. Young articulates is clearly based on gender; he opposes the educational regime because it transcends what he considers to be appropriate for the needs of women. This was not just a case of an individual writing independently to his Superior General, the report reveals the Jesuits' growing concern with the evolution of Mary Ward's Institute. From their foundation the Jesuits were prohibited from founding a female religious congregation, Ignatius feared that the availability and mobility of the Jesuits for mission would be seriously compromised by having to assume responsibility for female congregations. Mary Ward valued the assistance of the Jesuits as spiritual directors but it was never her intention to garner the support of the Jesuits as cofounders of her Institute. She was unequivocal in her insistence that her Institute would never come under the jurisdiction of the Jesuits. It would, like the Society itself be subject directly to the authority of the pope. Nevertheless in 1619, the Jesuit General

Slide 7: Vitelleschi

wrote to the English provincial instructing him to "prudently and modestly [...] warn the bishops of those cities in which these Virgins have houses, that the Society does not pretend to have any authority at all over these convents of women".

Why were the Jesuits so keen to put clear distance between the Society of Jesus and Mary Ward's Institute? Apart from the prohibition of their Founder there was another highly contentious issue. The secular or diocesan clergy in England were infuriated by the success of the Jesuits on the English mission field. Unlike their diocesan and mendicant counterparts the Jesuits were not bound by a vow of stability and this meant that they were free to carry out their ministries beyond the boundaries of diocese of parish. The secular clergy on the other hand were bound by such boundaries and they saw the intrusion of the Jesuits as gravely compromising their autonomy and authority within their own diocese and parishes.

Furthermore, there can be little doubt that, given the persecuted state of the Catholic Church in England, both groups, diocesan clergy and Jesuits were vying for the support of the same, relatively small group of wealth patrons and the Jesuits were winning. Mary Ward's Institute provided the ideal ammunition with which to attack the Jesuits. There was no better way to undermine the reputation of the Society of Jesus than to highlight what the secular clergy believed to be the questionable activities of a group of women for whom they coined the pejorative term "Jesuitesses". When it came to preparing their armoury the clergy's methods were invidious and divisive; they presented rumour as fact and they grossly exaggerated the more innovative aspects of Mary Ward's enterprise in their efforts to present it as a rebellious and schismatic Institute. And their words were powerful,

Slide 8: MW

in 1621, while Mary Ward was seeking confirmation of her Institute in Rome hints had already been made about a document delivered to the Pope. The author of the document was the Archpriest of England, William Harrison, during the time of the Reformation, the Archpriest had responsibility for all secular clergy in England and so his words had significant authority. In his report on Mary Ward's Institute the Archpriest is clearly dismayed by the apostolic activity of the women in England, he informs his reader: "they learn Latin, they practice speaking in public in order to hold conversations with externs". He accuses the members of the Institute, referred to by him as "Jesuitesses" as women of "bad refute, frivolous and shameless, and a scandal to the Catholic faith". (dissertation p. 97) The report arrived in Rome in November 1621 almost exactly a month to the day before Mary Ward arrived to seek approbation of her Institute.

Rumour and innuendo proved to be a valuable currency for the Institute's opponents; much damage was done to the Institute, the improbability of approval was almost certain. The level of vitriol was directed at the members of the Institute, particularly Mary Ward herself whose personal reputation was decimated to such an extent that for the remainder of her lifetime and indeed for centuries to come, she was as Sr. Immolata Wetter has so aptly described it, under the shadow of the Inquisition. The personal cost of these ongoing and frequently salacious attacks is evident in Mary Ward's correspondence. In a letter to Winefrid Wigmore, written from Rome in 1624, she writes:

Slide 9: WW and MW

"I think dear child the trouble and long loneliness you heard me speak of is not far from me [...]. You are the first I have uttered this conceit so plainly to, pray for me and for the work. It grieves me that I cannot have you also with me to help bear a part, but a part you will and shall bear howsoever."

P.112

Mary Ward words, as we know, would come to pass. Both would endure a "long loneliness" and Winefrid would truly have a share in Mary Ward's sufferings. In the early months of 1631 both women were arrested and imprisoned.

Ten years of Mary Ward's efforts towards approbation of her Institute ended in 1631 with Urban VIII's Bull of Suppression. Thanks to the painstaking work of Fr Joseph Grisar and Sr Immolata Wetter we know a great deal more about the process by which Mary Ward's Institute was finally supressed. The constraints of time do not allow for a detailed account here but we know for certain that Mary Ward was never called to defend the accusations that were levelled against her, her opponents were kept up to date on the increasingly pessimistic outlook for her Institute but Mary Ward herself was never informed. Because of the failure of the Curia to communicate directly with her, Mary Ward continued to believe in the possibility of a positive outcome for her case and so she continued houses and schools. The Curia took this as a sign of her defiance and rebellion as is clearly reflected in the vehement language of the Bull of Suppression. The papal bull, issued by Urban VIII,

Slide10: Urban VIII

describes the members of Mary Ward's Institute as "poisonous growth in the Church of God" the Pope decreed that they were to be "torn up from the roots lest they spread themselves any further". In the Church's view these women had caused so much harm that they were to be considered as "suppressed, extinct, rooted out, destroyed and abolished". (p. 147) The Bull was posted on the doors of St. Peter's. St. John Lateran, the Roman Chancellary and at the Campa de Fiori, it was sent to the Nuncios in Naples, Brussels, Cologne and Vienna – everywhere Mary Ward was known. This was the last drastic measure by Rome to put an end to the activities of a woman who rejected the conventions prescribed for women religious. Mary Ward had been publically disgraced by the Church that she had sought to serve.

But as we know the story does not end here – thanks to the remarkable resilience of CJ and IBVM sisters her Institute thrived and flourished. In 1631 Pope Urban VIII condemned members of the Institute as "poisonous growths in the Church of God". In May 2017, at a meeting of Provincials in Rome, Mary Ward sisters made a return visit to St. Peter's judiciously directed to a prime location by one of Mary Ward's successors, the IBVM General Superior Noelle Corsacadden.

Slide 11: Banner

I think the banner speaks for itself but look at fantastic reaction of Pope Francis when he saw the banner......!!

Sometimes in the words of Seamus Heaney, "hope and history rhyme".

The first companions of Mary Ward would remain faithful to her memory; they recognised in her a pious woman who sought only to serve God and the Church. Inspired by her memory, they continued to commit themselves to the idea of an active, unenclosed apostolate for women religious.

The efforts of the sisters to remain true to the original founding vision came at no small cost. In 1742, the bishop of Augsburg was deeply unhappy with the autonomy exercised by the sisters of the Institute in his diocese. He felt the right to appoint the chief superior belonged to him and not to the sisters. The sisters appealed their case to Rome and in response the bishop pointed out to the Vatican that these were the same Jesuitesses that had been condemned by Urban VIII. In response to the conflict, Pope Benedict XIV, reminded all concerned that the Bull of Suppression had never been revoked, he also decreed that the members of the Institute were to be prohibited from recognising Mary Ward as Foundress:

Slide 12: Benedict XIV

"the English Virgins may not in any way acknowledge Mary Ward for their mother or foundress. It is even less lawful for them or any other persons to call upon her as a saint in heaven, to pay her any public worship, or to perform any other act by which her asserted or supported sanctity may seem to be approved and attested". p. 153. This prohibition remained in place until 1909, more than two hundred and fifty years after the death of Mary Ward.

This memory of Mary Ward was and continues to be a dangerous memory. Her memory survived through the important canon of biographical and autobiographical accounts of her life and spirituality, but her memory survived in a more powerful through the members of her Institute (down to the present day). And it is to these women, these bearers of a dangerous memory, that I now want to turn our attention to.

I want, in particular, to look at two key figures, both of whom, in their own way worked to secure the legacy of Mary Ward. The first is Teresa Ball,

Slide 13: TB

she entered the Bar Convent in 1815 and returned to her native Dublin in 1821 to make the first Irish foundation of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary. In making this first foundation in Dublin, at Loreto Abbey Rathfarnham, Teresa Ball faced enormous difficulty. In the first few years of Loreto in Ireland, a large number of young sisters died from t.b. and there was constant pressure on the small quantity of resources both in terms of personnel and finances on Teresa Ball. Yet despite this pressure she made foundations not just in Ireland but in India, England, Spain and MauritiusGiven the relatively small number of Sisters she must have been tempted to confine her work to a boarding school at Loreto Abbey Rathfarnham, but she responded generously and whole-heartedly to the many requests that came to her to found Loreto schools in places beyond Rathfarnham, beyond Dublin and beyond Ireland...Given the fact that her resources were few and that funds were low she might well have been justified in simply consolidating her work in one location and

forgetting about other needs but she had the courage to see beyond her own needs to recognise the needs of others.....without this vision it is difficult to imagine how the Loreto story would have unfolded.....in the example of Teresa Ball we see the results of a hope-filled life. Teresa Ball's generosity was the expression of her hope that the work of the Loreto Sisters would make a contribution to women's education around the world and that contribution continues to be felt in the present day...Teresa Ball provided an important blueprint through which the spark of Mary Ward's founding vision could once again be fanned into a flame.....

In the landscape of this imposed amnesia important Institute figures who sought to re-instate Mary ward in her rightful place as Foundress of the Institute come to the fore. Time permits us to look at one figure in particular, Mother Michael Corcoran.

Slide 14: MC

Michael Corcoran was Superior General of the Irish Branch of Mary Ward's Institute when the prohibition on the recognition of Mary Ward as Foundress was lifted, but long before the lifting of this prohibition Michael Corcoran was faithful to the memory of Mary Ward. Prior to becoming Superior General, Michael Corcoran, was novice mistress, one of her novices recalls: "She had a great devotion to Mary Ward and trained her to reverence and pray to her as Foundress of her Institute, though she was not at that time officially declared to be such." (p. 212)

Michael Corcoran's understanding of the legacy of Mary Ward is particularly evident in two key spheres of her leadership; the first concerns her efforts, in collaboration with other Institute leaders, to unite Mary Ward's now fragmented Institute under one Superior General, the second concerns her efforts to promote and advance the education of women. In a case of history repeating itself, Michael Corcoran's efforts to unite Mary Ward's Institute brought her leadership under severe

scrutiny and censure by the Archbishop of Dublin. Mirroring the efforts of her Foundress in advancing the cause of women's education Michael Corcoran invested enormously in the effort to establish the first university for Catholic women in Ireland. Sadly, the increased scrutiny that was placed on her efforts to return to the founding vision of Mary Ward meant that her efforts were far from realised and at the end of her term as Superior General much of what she had worked for had yet to be achieved.

In the rich visual archive, we find a large number of images of Michael Corcoran, here's one that is particularly interesting.

Slide 15: MC/camera

In this picture of Mother Michael you can see that she is being photographed taking a photograph. She taught herself to use a camera and she also learned how to develop her own photographs....she was a woman, that was in many ways, able to see beyond her time, she refused to be confined by the unnecessary conventions or expectations that society placed on women at that time....she, knew perhaps, that like Mary Ward she was planting the seeds for a future that she herself would not see

If we reflect on the lives of Mary Ward, Teresa Ball and Michael Corcoran, one thing is certain throughout their lives they crossed many boundaries but only *some* involved a physical journey.

Slide 16: MW TB MC

The image of Mary Ward as pilgrim is iconic, and perhaps is a worthwhile one for us to imprint on our own hearts. In the journeys that Mary Ward made she crossed many boundaries of culture and tradition..... what boundaries have you had to cross over these last few days, what boundaries remain? At what threshold, in my own life, am I now standing? The Irish poet and mystic John O'Donohue reminds us: "No threshold needs to be a threat, but rather an invitation and a promise.

Whatever comes the great sacrament of life will remain faithful to us, blessing us always with visible signs of invisible grace. We merely need to trust". (*Benedictus*)

The network that Mary Ward established and nourished was sustained by her ability to cross boundaries. This international gathering of Mary Ward friends is hugely significant but the true significance can only be realised if the experience of these days has an impact on our work, on our relationships, on our spirituality..... crossing boundaries was a very strong theme in the recent IBVM/CJ Education meeting in South Africa, in her opening remarks to the international gathering of educators, the IBVM Superior General Sr. Noelle reminds us: *Each one here has a gift to bring, each one here has an experience to bring. If we come to listen deeply and to learn and be inspired by one another, we too will be transformed.*

We are at a moment in our history when there has never been more effort invested in building walls; consolidating and solidifying our boundaries; whipping up an intense fear of "the other".

Slide 17: Women refugees and young child

Over these days you have remembered the life and legacy of that extraordinary Mary Ward, but this remembering is not meant to be nostalgic; the authentic remembering of her life is truly dangerous. This international gathering of Mary Ward friends is a powerful testament to Mary Ward's determination to break down the boundaries that diminished and negated the role of women in the Church and in society of her time. The boundaries that are being created in our days are created by those who seek to uphold the status quo, those who want to reduce our societies to economies and those who want to make us fearful and complicit – the concept of a dangerous memory is embedded in theology – it is Eucharistic, it refuses to allow us to forget, it calls us into solidarity. As I reflect on this, I call to mind The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo

Slide 18: Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo

(Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo), an association of Argentine mothers whose children

"disappeared" during the state terrorism of the military dictatorship, between 1976 and 1983. They

organized while trying to learn what had happened to their children, and began to march in 1977 at

the Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires, in front of the Casa Rosada presidential palace, in public defiance

of the government's state terrorism intended to silence all opposition.

Authentic remembering is dangerous, it calls us into the kind of solidarity that the theologian Jon

Sobrino describes as making us "all more human, more like brothers and sisters, more like sons and

daughters of the same [God]".

In 1999, the difficult decision was made to close Loreto Abbey Rathfarnham, this was a landmark

decision in the history of the IBVM branch and a number of rituals punctuated the sadness and the

letting go not just of the building but of the memories that the building held for some many sisters,

past pupils and friends. In one of the rituals Sr. Ríonach Donlon (the Irish provincial at that time)

caught the moment beautifully in this poem by the late Karol Wojtlya, John Paul II, in the lines from

his poem Thought is a Strange Distance.

Slide 19: MW

I think the lines are an appropriate conclusion as we reflect on this place that is so significant,

whether that is York, or Mulwith, or Mount Grace or most importantly.....here:

"The place is important, the place is holy

The stones have been replaced many times

The holes of the street have been filled in

The sand from that time flowed innumerable times

To and fro, no little grain remained where it was.

But I do not seek this identity: the place is made

Important because she has been there.

I find myself in the same landscape,

Seeing it at the same time a place of meeting.

I do not make a pilgrimage to the stones....

I go on a pilgrimage to identity....

There is a sense of the re-discovery of self in the

Landscape. To this I make my pilgrimage.

This place is holy."